

**James T. Ford and Company
Records, 1829-1928**

**Mss: 776
1826-1910
F699**

Historical Note:

James T. Ford, son of Elisha and Lydia (Turner) Ford was born September 1, 1794. His brother, Nathaniel, born January 23, 1797 was the first of his family to move to Duxbury, Massachusetts. Apprenticed to Robert Cushman of Marshfield in 1813 to learn the clothier trade, Nathaniel lived with Eleazer Harlow of Duxbury, during the five years of his indenture at the Duxbury Woolen and Cotton Manufactory. In 1818, Nathaniel contracted to work in the mill which he did until 1823. His brothers, James and Peleg, operated a shop in Boston during these years, but joined Nathaniel to buy out Eleazer Harlow, owner of the Duxbury Woolen and Cotton Manufactory in 1823. Both moved to Duxbury to help run the mill.

Ford's Store, along with their boarding house, grist mill and filling mill dominated Millbrook Valley, the Duxbury village where their buildings were located. One of the brothers, a hatter by trade, opened a small shop adjacent to the mill soon after moving to Duxbury. This expansion set the pattern for numerous other additions which over the years created a series of buildings where the Ford's sold dry goods, groceries, flour, grain, furniture, crockery, carpets, millinery goods, custom and ready-to-wear clothing. Local tradition held that any desired item could be purchased at Ford's, and it was reputed to be the first department store in America.

The business remained in the Ford family for many years. In 1852, the firm changed ownership and became Nathaniel Ford & Sons. Eventually Jonathan Ford assumed control of the business in the 1880s, and he continued business under that name. Upon the death of Jonathan in 1910, it passed out of the Ford family to H. E. Walker. Fire destroyed the buildings in 1921.